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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN - O'MARA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ENRG](#) [EPET](#) [KZ](#)

SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: MINE EXPLOSION KILLS 41

¶1. Summary: An explosion in Kazakhstan's "Lenin" coal mine, owned by Rotterdam-based Mittal Steel, killed an estimated 41 miners on the morning of September 20. More than 300 escaped the mine after the blast, which was reportedly caused by a methane gas buildup. The GOK has formed a committee to investigate the accident, the second deadly mine explosion in three years at Mittal-owned mines in the Karaganda oblast. End summary.

Methane Blast Kills Dozens

¶2. A methane gas explosion killed an estimated 41 miners in Mittal Steel's "Lenin" mine, located in Karaganda (120 miles south of Astana), on the morning of September 20. The blast, triggered at a depth of 620 meters, occurred while 367 workers labored in the mine. 324 reportedly were able to escape the mine after the explosion. A half-dozen miners have been hospitalized in nearby Shakhtinsk, two reportedly in critical condition.

Government Condolences and Inquest

¶3. According to press reports, local police launched a criminal investigation into the blast. On September 21 Prime Minister Akhmetov announced the formation of a commission to investigate the accident, and traveled to the scene of the accident. President Nazarbayev issued a statement of condolences, remarking that, during his 20-year experience working in Karaganda (as a blast furnace operator), he had seen many deadly accidents. Mittal Steel CEO Lakshmi Mittal also issued a statement.

Mittal a Major Employer.

¶4. The Lenin mine is one of a dozen in the Karaganda region which supplies coal to Mittal's Temirtau steel plant, one of the world's largest. (2005 revenues were reported at \$1.4 billion. The plant accounts for 4% of Kazakhstan's GDP, and the mining and steel complex is one of the country's largest employers, with a workforce exceeding 20,000.)

.With a Spotty Safety Record

¶5. The Lenin mine disaster is the most recent of several catastrophic accidents at Mittal's Karaganda industrial complex. A December 2004 explosion at the Mittal-owned Shakhtinskaya mine killed 23 people. Two 2005 fires in the Temirtau steel plant, while not resulting in fatalities, caused a drop in steel output from 2004 to 2005. Mittal's critics often charge that the Soviet-era

steel plant and mines are unsafe. While Mittal workers occasionally voice safety concerns, the most recent worker unrest (a strike of 3,000 miners in June 2006) focused on wage, rather than safety, demands.

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